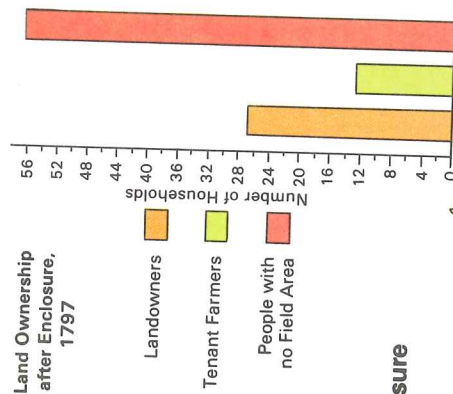
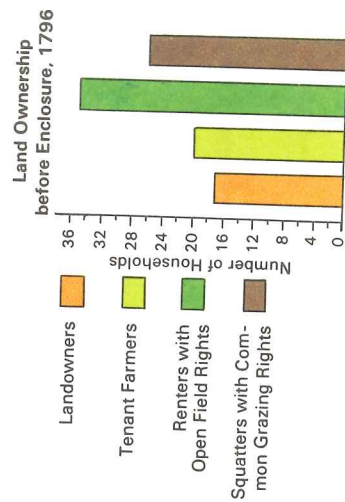


# 81 Changes in Agriculture: The Enclosure of Sherington 1797

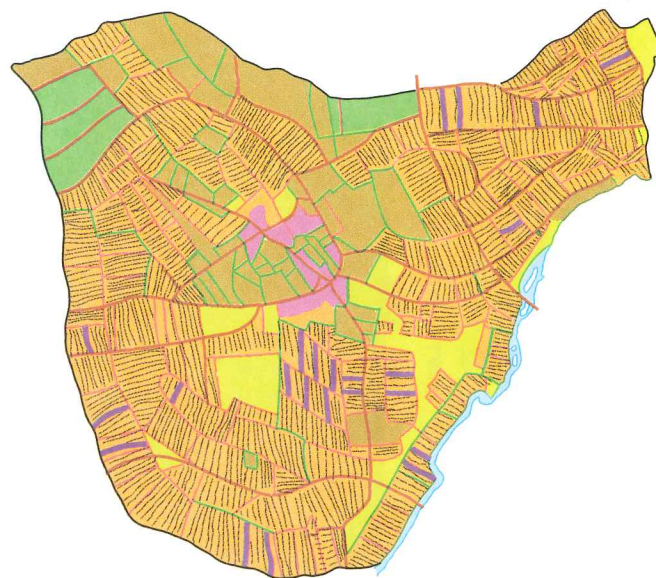
Increases in England's agricultural productivity resulted from two things. First, new methods of farming were introduced. These are illustrated on page 83. Second, the medieval open fields were enclosed.

Medieval farmers had held their land in strips scattered in the large, open fields. Their successors had continued to farm in much the same way. Through the process of enclosure, the holdings in the open fields were rearranged and combined into single units better suited to the new farming techniques. These new farms, larger than the original strips but smaller than the open fields, were enclosed by the planting of hedges. Notice how Thomas Mudd's scattered strips have been combined into a single unit.

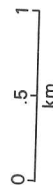
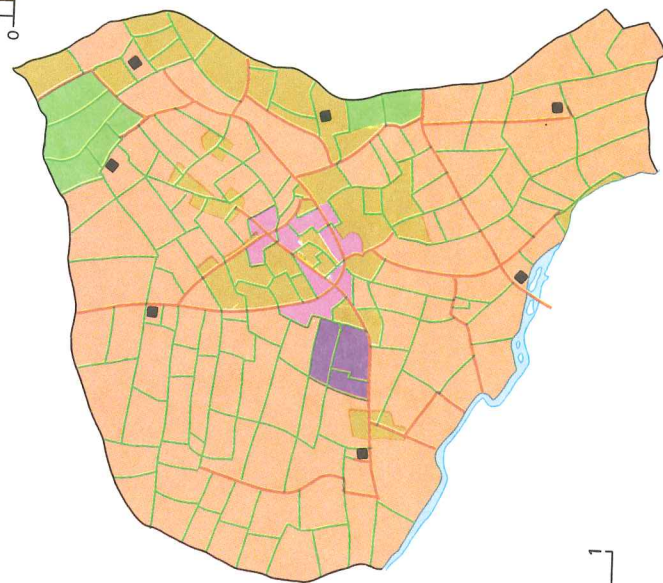
Enclosure had a major effect on the lives of the villagers. The number of landowners increased slightly, while the number of tenant farmers decreased. Those villagers who could produce written title to their land were given allotments in the new arrangement. However, few of them could actually do this because the rights of most cottagers in the village had rested on custom only. Many villagers kept their gardens, but received nothing else. In addition, there were squatters, people who had no proof of their rights to any land at all. Before enclosure these squatters had been able to graze animals on the open fields and glean any crops left after harvest. After enclosure they received only the land on which their cottages stood.



Before Enclosure

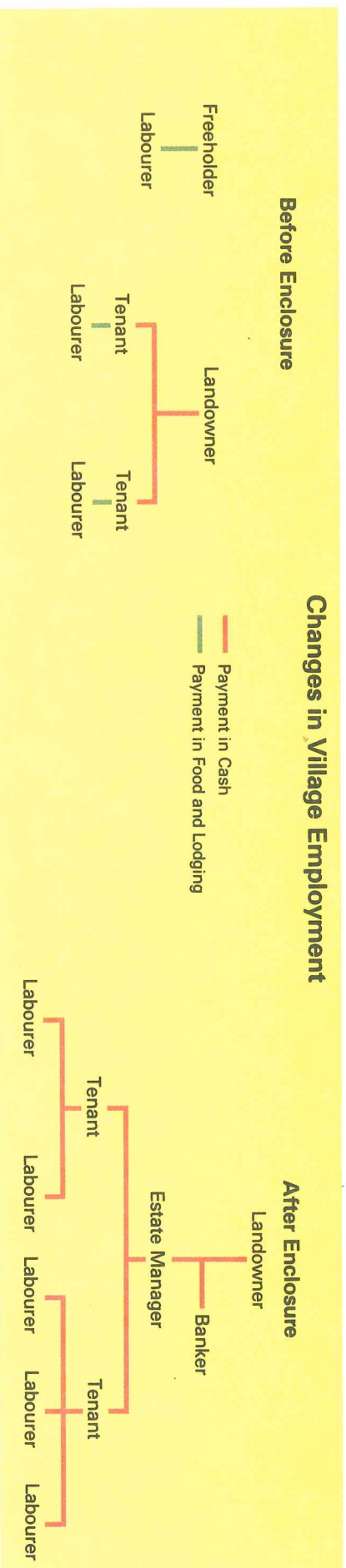
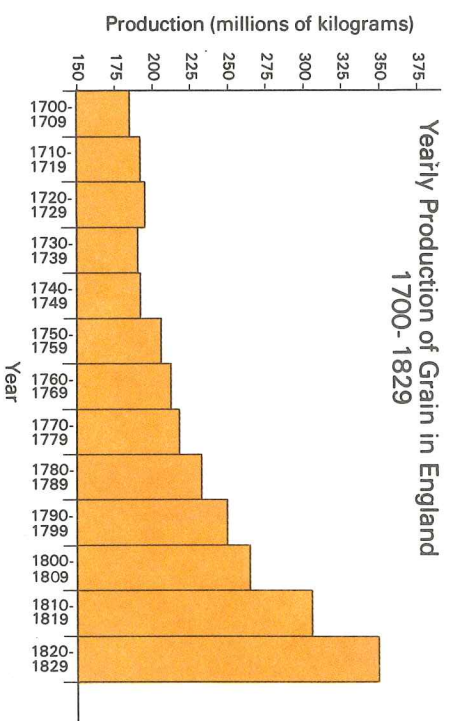


After Enclosure



Enclosure itself was not new. In cases where only a few landowners were involved, it had been carried out by private agreement for a very long time. From 1760 onward, agricultural production increased dramatically and enclosure became widely practised. Most enclosures were now carried out by Act of Parliament. It was during this second period of enclosure (between 1760 and 1815) that the major changes in agriculture and social structure occurred.

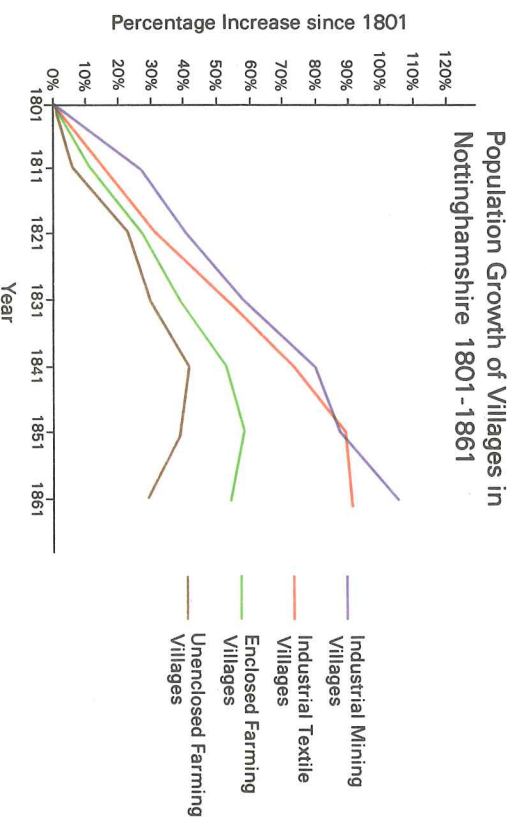
Before enclosure the scale of farming was relatively small. It was oriented towards local markets, and the relationships involved remained reasonably simple and traditional. Afterwards, farming was a more complex commercial operation oriented towards specialized production for large urban markets. It was now part of what could be called the estate system, in which overall business direction came from the landowner, his banker and his estate manager. The tenant farmers were the middle management, responsible for the actual processes of production.



Enclosure and the new farming methods created more work in agriculture. Nottinghamshire was one of the counties in England most affected by both enclosure and industrial growth. Between 1801 and 1851, the population of the enclosed villages of Nottinghamshire continued to grow faster than that of other rural communities (see graph to the right).

In England as a whole, the actual number of people employed in agriculture continued to rise, but rural population was growing faster than jobs could be created in agriculture. This surplus population was forced to migrate to the industrial towns for work.

Jobs in agriculture became more specialized, and the labourer now worked entirely for pay. This created a new group of poor people in the village. Since these people had no land for farming or gardening, and work was not always available, they often had to rely on "poor relief." This outcome of enclosure was common throughout Britain and was one of the gravest consequences of the movement to modernize farming.



# 83 Technological Change in Agriculture

From the late 1600's onwards, changes in agriculture provided Britain with more food. Improved crops, livestock breeds, techniques and machines greatly increased the productivity of each farmer. As a result, increases in food production were able to support the growing population in the cities and towns.

